

CHAPTER TWO

CLAIBORNE & ISAAC WALL OF NORTH CAROLINA



At the beginning of the American Revolution, the Wall family (including Richard Wall and his sons, James, Zachariah and Claiborne) migrated to Rockingham County, North Carolina from Culpeper County, Virginia.¹ Near the time that Claiborne Wall was born in 1770, five colonists were gunned down after a riot in Boston. This skirmish was known as the Boston Massacre. As the Walls settled in their new home, the British continued to enforce tight political control over the fledgling colonies. The Wall family observed this growing conflict at first hand since many of the battles (i.e., Ramsay's Mill, King's Mountain, Cowpens) took place in North Carolina. As the nation changed during this war, so did the lives of the Wall family.

THE COLONIES BEFORE REVOLUTION

Before the colonies were at war with Britain, many of the provinces aided "Mother England" in fighting other colonial wars. North Carolina contributed men and fund to help Britain fight in border disputes against the French and Indians in North America. In 1760, Hugh Waddell of Wilmington led North Carolina troops to victory over the Cherokee Indians. This battle took place at Fort Dobbs, near present-day Statesville. After the Cherokee signed a peace treaty, vast areas of land were open to Virginia and the Carolina settlers.²

These colonial and Indian wars had an adverse affect on the British, however. They drove the British government into debt. In an attempt to solve these financial problems, England imposed a series of taxes on the American colonies, and the colonists did not respond well to the implementation of these new taxes. In fact, a group of North Carolinians called "the Sons of Liberty" led several demonstrations

and even armed rebellions against the taxes. Some western North Carolina farmers called the “Regulators” rebelled against taxes and against unjust treatment from eastern officials. William Tryon, the royal governor, needed more than a thousand troops to defeat the Regulators in the Battle of Alamance fought on 16 May, 1771.³

The American Revolution resulted from many years of economic and political oppression. Disaffection of British rule had caused many in England to leave and settle in the New World. From the first settlement in Jamestown to the final draft of the Declaration of Independence, the English believed that the American colonies were totally subservient in all respects. Throughout the 1700s, Britain’s Parliament enacted laws and acts to restrain the freedom of the colonies. One of the first of these acts was the Stamp Act which was passed in 1765 and repealed in 1766. Only a year later Parliament passed the Townsend Acts. Both of these acts increased colonial taxes in sales and property. But the colonists believed that without representation in Parliament, the English had no right to raise their taxes. The colonists retaliated against these oppressive laws with violence. Such an event was the Boston Massacre in 1770. In 1773, many Bostonians protested against the British duty on tea imported by the colonies. They disguised themselves as Indians, boarded British ships in the Boston harbor and dumped loads of tea overboard. Warfare soon followed.⁴

The Battles of Lexington and Concord broke out in 1773. This was the beginning of the Revolutionary War. These battles began after British troops tried to steal guns from the colonists. The colonists retaliated and the skirmish ended in a draw. These acts of violence angered the British. In order to maintain control of the situation, Parliament passed a series of acts designed to punish the colonists for the Boston Tea Party and other violent acts. These acts were known as the Intolerable Acts of 1774. To fight these laws, Provincial Congresses were held in order to see if the colony was for or against the actions of the British. These colonies united in a Continental Congress to form their own army and fight against the Intolerable Acts. The colonists also decided to stop exporting goods to England until the acts were repealed. This embargo stopped the major exportation of tobacco and cotton that came from the southern colonies. The state of North Carolina played a significant role in the colonies’ victory against the British.



Untrained American patriots defeated General Cornwallis at the "Battle of the Cowpens" in North Carolina.

THE REVOLUTION IN NORTH CAROLINA

In 1774, the first Provincial Congress met at one of North Carolina's two capital cities, New Bern. It was decided at this conference that North Carolina would join other colonies in the revolutionary movement that was sweeping through the land. Thus, British rule in North Carolina came to an end when Governor Josiah Martin fled New Bern in May 1775. The second Provincial Congress met and established two regiments of the Continental Army and a temporary state government.

The Provincial Congress was made up of men elected from each precinct and town where representation had been granted. Not all counties were entitled to the same number of representatives. Many of the older counties had five representatives each while those more recently developed were allowed only two. Each town granted representation was allowed one representative. The presiding officer of the Provincial Congress was called the speaker and was elected from the entire membership of the house. When a vacancy occurred, a new election was ordered by the speakers to fill it. On the final day of each session, the bills passed by the legislature were signed by both the speakers and the president of the council. The Congress met on a regular basis until the end of the Revolutionary War. There was a



(Source: *Atlas of American History*, 1943)

constant battle over the issues of the time. Two of the most explosive issues were the power of the purse and the electing of the treasurer. Another issue concerned who had the authority to create new counties. On more than one occasion, these counties were created without proper consultation and proper legislative action by the lower house.⁵

On 12 April 1776, North Carolina authorized her delegates in the Continental Congress to vote for independence. This was the first official action by a colony calling for independence. The 83 delegates present in Halifax, North Carolina at the fourth Provincial Congress unanimously adopted the Halifax Resolves, which read as follows:

The Select Committee taking into Consideration the usurpations and violences attempted and committed by the King and Parliament of Britain against America, and the further Measures to be taken for frustrating the same, and for the better defense of this province reported as follows, to wit,

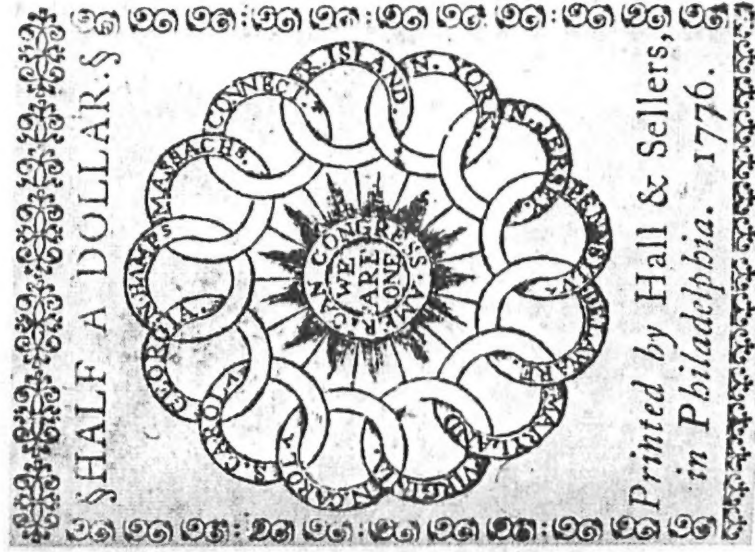
‘It appears to your Committee that pursuant to the Plan concerted by the British Ministry for subjugating America, the King and Parliament of Great Britain have usurped a Power over the Persons and Properties of the People unlimited and uncontrouled [sic] and disregarding their humble Petitions for Peace, Liberty and safety, have made divers Legislative Acts, denouncing War Famine and every Species of Calamity daily employed in destroying the People and committing the most horrid devastations on the Country. That Governors in different Colonies have declared Protection to Slaves who should imbre their Hands in the Blood of their Masters. Theat the Ships belonging to America are declared prizes of War and many of them have been violently seized and confiscated in consequence of which multitudes of the people have been destroyed or from easy Circumstances reduced to the most Lamentable distress.

Resolved that the delegates for this Colony in the Continental Congress be empowered to concur with the other delegates of the other Colonies in declaring Independency, and forming foreign Alliances, resolving to this Colony the Sole, and Exclusive right of forming a Constitution of Laws for this Colony, and of appointing delegates from time to time (under the direction of a general Representation thereof to meet the delegates of the other Colonies for such purposes as shall be hereafter pointed out.⁶

The Halifax Resolves were not only important because they were the first official action calling for independence, but also because they were not unilateral recommendations. They were instead recommendations directed to all the colonies and their delegates assembled at the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Virginia followed with her own recommendations soon after the adoption of the Halifax Resolution and eventually on 4 July, the final draft of the Declaration of Independence was signed. William Hooper, Joseph Hewes, and John Penn were the delegates from North Carolina who signed the Declaration of Independence. After representatives from the thirteen colonies signed the Declaration, it was sent to London to be read by Parliament and the King. The Declaration of Independence officially declared their intentions of autonomy from the British and it officially declared war on the British to obtain this independence.⁷

After North Carolina sent delegates to Philadelphia to attend the First Continental Congress, people within the colonies began to take sides with either the colonists or the British. When the Revolution broke out in April, 1775, North Carolinians also had to choose who they would support. Those who opposed the British were called "Whigs." Those who remained loyal to the king were called "Tories." On 27 February 1776, Whig forces, under Colonels Richard Caswell and Alexander Lillington, crushed the Tories in the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge. This was the first battle of the Revolutionary War in North Carolina. The Whig victory presented a planned British invasion of North Carolina.

Many of the Revolutionary battles were fought outside North Carolina's borders. However, North Carolinians joined the fight against the British in Virginia, Georgia, and South Carolina. In 1780, British forces led by Lord Charles Cornwallis



These "Continental" were issued as currency by the Continental Congress in 1776.

marched toward north Carolina from the south. Part of Cornwallis's army was slaughtered in the Battle of King's Mountain, just south of North Carolina. But after a retreat, Cornwallis moved northward again, this time into North Carolina. On 15 March 1781, General Nathanael Greene's forces outlasted Cornwallis's troops in the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. After this loss, the British abandoned North Carolina for the remainder of the war.⁸

In 1776, the fifth Provincial Congress adopted a permanent state constitution and on 21 December, Richard Caswell was elected the first governor. They furnished ten additional regiments to the Continental Army and commissioned thousands of men for the state militia. The 1777 Battle of Saratoga was a significant victory for the Continental Army. Not only did the colonists beat the British, but they also gained a powerful ally in France. Until this time, France was hesitant in siding with the colonists in fear that the British would launch a full scale war against them. This same year the Articles of Confederation were written. This was the first official constitution

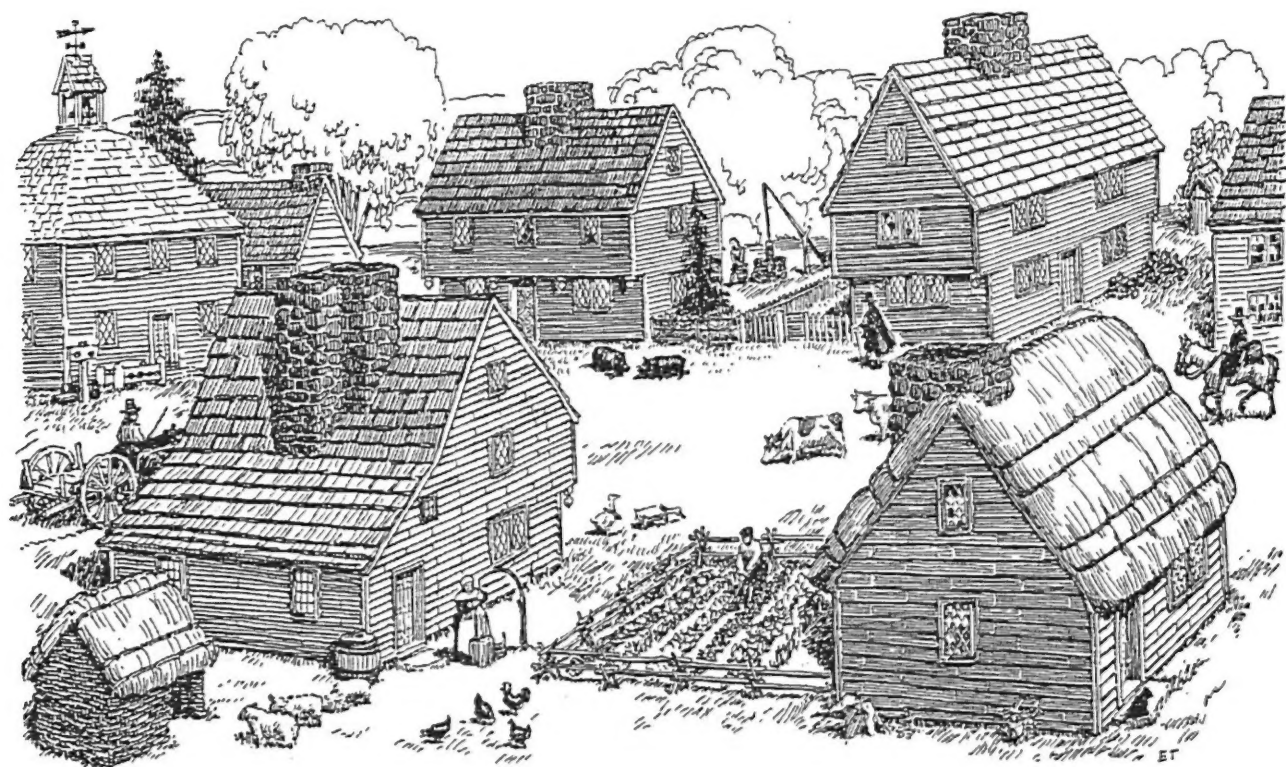
of the thirteen original states. The Articles of Confederation were not adopted until 1781. In 1782, the American leaders had their first peace talks with the British. The next year the Treaty of Paris was signed. This officially ended the American Revolution. In this treaty the United States of America was to be recognized as a free and independent nation. Britain also agreed to pull out all of its troops from the States. In 1787, the United States Constitution was written. This document was written to give more power to the federal government than the Articles of Confederation. The Constitution originally contained seven articles and ten amendments known as the Bill of Rights. It has been the supreme law of the nation since its adoption in 1789.⁹

NORTH CAROLINA AFTER REVOLUTION

On 21 November 1789, North Carolina adopted the United States Constitution, becoming the twelfth state to enter the Union. Throughout this revolutionary period the state government of North Carolina continued to divide the vast state into counties. In 1785, well after the Revolutionary War ended, the state formed Rockingham County from the British province of Guilford County.¹⁰ This is where the Wall family had settled and where they stayed until some of the progenitors later left the region for the west.

In 1789, 19-year-old Claiborne Wall met and fell in love with a young lady named Mary Jane James, who was also from Rockingham County. Shortly after their marriage in 1790, the Walls had a son who they named Isaac.¹¹ The details of Claiborne and Mary Jane Wall's lives are for the most part unrecorded except for their residence and vital records. During the early years of their marriage, the Walls witnessed changes in their nation and state. The United States of America had become a sovereign nation with the Revolution, and North Carolina was an integral part of the new nation.

North Carolina itself was changing. During the years shortly after the Revolution, many of the states, including North Carolina, changed their borders. In 1790, North Carolina ceded her western lands which included Washington, Davidson, Hawkins, Greene, Sullivan, Sumner, and Tennessee counties, to the Federal Government. Between 1790 and 1796, the territory was known as the Tennessee Territory, and in 1796 it became the state of Tennessee, which was the fifteenth state to join the Union.



A late 17th Century colonial village. (Source: Colonial Living, 1957)

Local and state government in North Carolina was also evolving to meet the needs of its citizens. Just prior to the turn of the century and during the time just after, two prominent North Carolina politicians were leading in local offices. Andrew Jackson, who would become the seventh U.S. President, and James K. Polk, who would become the eleventh U.S. President, played major roles in the development of the state of North Carolina before their presidencies.

North Carolina became the first state with a state-owned university. The University of North Carolina was designated in a section of the first state constitution drawn up in 1776, directing the establishment of one or more universities “in which all useful learning shall be duly encouraged and promoted. State support, it directed, should be provided so that instruction might be available at low prices.”¹² The American Revolution intervened and it was not until 1789, the same year that George Washington became president, that the University was chartered by the state’s General Assembly.

Despite constitutional instruction t, no state appropriations were made, and the trustees were left to secure land and money themselves. On 12 October 1793, the cornerstone was laid for a brick building on a hilltop near the center of the state. The site was marked only by a small Anglican chapel that soon shared part of its name -- New Hope Chapel Hill -- with the community that developed there. legislator and trustee William R. Davie, who had been instrumental in securing passage of the charter, took the lead in organizing the University. Davie presided over the laying of the cornerstone. In time he came to be called the "Father of the University." Since that time, every state in the Union has developed a state university.¹³

Following the death of Mary Jane Wall, Isaac's father, Claiborne, married for a second time on February 5, 1800. His new wife was Agnes (Agga) Sanders from Rockingham County. Claiborne's 1802-dated will made the following provisions for his second wife, Agnes, and their family (Eleanor "Elly" age 2 and an unborn son): "I, Claiborn Wall of the County of Rockingham in the State of North Carolina being sick and weake of body but of perfect mind and memory thanks be to God and Calling to mind the mortality of my body and knowing that it is appointed for all men once to die do make and ordain this my last will and testament....First, I give and bequeath to my beloved wife, Agga, one negro named Sarah. Second I give and bequeath to by beloved daughter Elly one negro girl. Thirdly, I give and bequeath one negro boy named Tom to the Child my wife is pregnant with. Fourth, I give and bequeath one Sorrel mare to my beloved wife." The balance of the will stipulated that Claiborne's real property of 52 acres and home be divided between his wife and children.¹⁴

On 12 November 1818, Isaac Wall married a young lady named Nancy Duncan. Nancy was the daughter of Colonel William Duncan who fought at the Battle of the Cowpens (near present-day Asheville) with Captain William Washington during the Revolutionary War with Great Britain.

Families like the Walls were successful in starting small farms and raising crops. Cotton and tobacco grew readily in these farms and were sold to merchants who then sold them to traders in the northern states or in foreign lands.

Isaac and Nancy Wall began their family soon after they were married. The couple would soon have four sons to raise. Each of these sons was born in Rockingham County--Elijah Wall in 1819, William Madison Wall on 30 September 1821, and Johnson Claiborne Wall was born 1823 in Rockingham.¹⁵



The Wall families raised tobacco and held slaves on their lands.

The day of 14 March 1829 would prove to be a bitter-sweet day in the history of the Wall family. During the delivery of her fourth son, Richard, Nancy died suddenly. Although the baby survived, the young family grieved the loss of their mother and wife. After the death of his beloved wife, Isaac Wall decided that he and his young family of four boys would move into the western frontier, to Sangamon County, Illinois¹⁶. Isaac had relatives that were settling this part of the frontier. For the boys, all under the age of ten, this journey from the eastern seaboard to the Midwest was an arduous one.

Upon settling in Illinois, Isaac left his sons in the care of relatives as he set out to find secure employment. He left Sangamon County for Missouri and later Texas. Tragically, the four Wall sons never heard from their father again. It is likely that he was killed on the western trails en route to Texas. As orphans, the Wall children were cared for by their relatives in Illinois.

ENDNOTES

- ¹. *Rockingham County, North Carolina Census Records*. Film #162,798 LDS Family History Library.
- ². Hugh T. Lefler, and W. S. Powell., *Colonial North Carolina*, (Scribner, New York, New York: 1973).
- ³. Hugh T. Lefler, and A. R. Newsome., *The History of the Southern State: North Carolina*, 3rd ed. (University of North Carolina Press, Raleigh, North Carolina: 1973).
- ⁴. Tristan Roy, and Ross Harmes., *The American Revolution: Taking a Stand in History*, Unpublished Manuscript.
- ⁵. Jack D. Fleer., *North Carolina Politics: An Introduction*, (University of North Carolina Press, Raleigh, North Carolina: 1968).
- ⁶. The *Halifax Resolves* as cited in John Yoder, *Historical Highlights of North Carolina*, (Sussex Printing: Raleigh, North Carolina), 132.
- ⁷. Yoder, *Historical Highlights of North Carolina*, 134.
- ⁸. Lefler and Newsome, *The History of the Southern State: North Carolina*.
- ⁹. Roy and Harmes., *The American Revolution: Taking a Stand in History*.
- ¹⁰. James W. Clay., *North Carolina Atlas: A Portrait of a Changing Southern State*, (University of North Carolina Press: Raleigh, North Carolina: 1975).
- ¹¹. Rockingham County Census Records. Film #337,917 LDS Family History Library.
- ¹². William S. Powell., *History of the University*, (University of University Press, Raleigh, North Carolina: 1989).
- ¹³. Ibid.
- ¹⁴. Rockingham County, North Carolina Will Abstracts, Film #975,663. LDS Family History Library.
- ¹⁵. Rockingham County, North Carolina Census Records, Film #162,798. LDS Family History Library.
- ¹⁶. Sangamon County, Illinois Census Records, Film #07649. LDS Family History Library.



William Madison Wall (1821-1869)